

The Importance of the One on One Meeting

While most leaders recognise the importance of having regular team meetings, many fail to have regular one - on-one meetings with each member of their team. In today's fast paced, time poor world, they mostly rely on email to communicate.

In my experience, regular one on one review meetings with team members are the most important meetings you can have as a leader and are a good investment of time. The intimacy of the meeting allows you to share and reflect on different points of view. When conducted with a positive intent, the result is mutual understanding, trust and respect, which is critical to organisational success. Trust and respect of this kind can never be generated via email.

Why bother?

Regular review meetings are designed to examine the progress of the individual against the key objectives of the role. They are not meant to replace or do away with specific project based or team meetings. The idea is that you keep focused on the individual's 'big picture' goals. Too often a single project or 'crisis' hijack the main game. Review meetings help to keep things in perspective and enable you both to avoid getting sucked into a vortex of reactive crisis management.

A side-benefit of having one on one weekly meetings is that you focus on ensuring that team meetings only cover issues that everyone in the team needs to be across. This helps make your team meetings efficient and effective and ensures that little time is wasted on issues that really should be dealt with outside the meeting.

As for any meeting, the key to an effective one on one meeting is clarity of purpose. The context and objectives of the meeting must be understood by both parties. In addition, the venue itself must be comfortable and conducive to having an uninterrupted conversation. For remote team members, Skype or video conferencing provides an easy to use enhancement to the phone.

Setting a framework

One of the first meetings you must have is to discuss and confirm that the individual's position description is current and appropriate. In particular, you and your team member must agree on what are the outcomes or deliverables for the role and how you will measure performance in relation to those objectives. This sounds simple and easy but experience shows it is neither simple nor easy. Take the time to think it through and get it right. If you can come up with 5-7 key outcomes with a number of SMART goals for each area (simple,

measurable, actionable, relevant and time bound) you will be well on the way to having a great working relationship.

You can then create a framework for your regular one on one review meetings. While this framework will evolve over time, the key objectives and performance measures will always be at the heart of your discussions.

How often and for how long?

How often you should meet and how long the review meetings need to be will depend on you and the individual you are working with. Some people will love the opportunity to meet regularly, while others will feel it is unnecessary and intrusive. From your perspective, if you have a team of 10 people you will obviously have less time to devote to the meetings than if you had a team of two.

Weekly meetings often work best as they allow an ongoing focus and rhythm to develop and if managed well, will lead to efficient utilisation of time. Rather than ad hoc engagement, it will force team members to think through issues and take advantage of the time you are setting aside to meet.

The time you need for the review meetings will depend on the circumstances. In some instances it will make sense to start with 30 minute to one hour meetings. As you both become more comfortable with your roles and each other, the time needed may reduce substantially. Many of my clients like to have 20-30 min weekly review meetings with each of their team and at the end of the month schedule on a one hour meeting to allow time to review the month and plan for next month.

What do you discuss?

The focus is on two simple questions:

1. What did you do this week / month that helped drive the business towards our key objectives?
2. What are you going to do next week / month that will help achieve the outcomes we want?

The meetings should be shaped by the style of the individual. Many people will appreciate a brief initial discussion about their personal lives. Others will prefer to stay focussed on work issues. In any event, the key is for you to demonstrate a genuine interest in the well-being of your team member. When people feel you care about them, they inevitably put more into their work. After establishing rapport, the focus of the meeting should turn to progress against the individual's key objectives. You are now playing the role of coach / manager.

Examples of some useful questions to ask are:

- *What specific actions did you take [this week/month] to achieve [insert the key objective]?*
- *What worked well?*
- *What were the key obstacles or difficulties?*
- *How might we overcome these obstacles or difficulties?*
- *Of the options, what makes most sense to you?*
- *What can I do to help?*
- *What actions do you plan to take next [week/month] to achieve your key goals in this area?*

By building the meetings around a series of questions on each of the key agreed outcomes, you ensure that you and your team member are constantly thinking about the stuff that matters. This means that there are no surprises at formal Performance Reviews. While some objectives may not require weekly/monthly actions, asking the question each meeting will help remind you both that some action needs to be taken within the formal Performance Review timeframe.

Mark Rosenberg is a Leadership Strategist and Executive Coach with Balanced Curve, a boutique leadership coaching and consulting firm. He can be contacted at mark@balancedcurve.com or via the website www.balancedcurve.com.